

# **SURVEY AND DOCUMENTATION OF MEGALITHIC SITES OF ASSAM**



सत्यमेव जयते

**A PROJECT UNDER THE ASSAM INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH FOR  
TRIBALS AND SCHEDULED CASTES,  
GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM  
(2018-19)**

**PROJECT COORDINATION  
UPALA BARUA**

**PROJECT PREPARED BY  
UPALA BARUA**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Assam has a rich heritage of megalithic monuments and tradition as in many other parts of the world including North East India. Megalithic culture that began in the neolithic times continued throughout successive phases of human civilization in different regions till recent times. The megalithic map of India includes most of southern, central, north, eastern and north eastern states. Till a few decades, many tribal communities of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram used to erect megalithic monuments with traditional rites and rituals. With the changing times, forces like migration, impact of Christianity, education, developmental-activities most of these communities have been abandoning these traditional practices leaving the formerly erected large ( mega) stone ( lithos) monuments here and there. Assam too can boast of numerous such monuments in different locations. Significantly, in Assam a few communities like the Plains Karbis are still keeping this tradition alive. Apart from a few PhD research and academic writings focusing on different areas, no attempt has been made to document systematically the megalithic monuments that are dotted in different forest, rural and even urban areas. Due to lack of awareness, population rise, pressures on land or developmental activities like building roads, bridges, these megalithic monuments are either being dismantled or left to decay without proper efforts at their preservation. Realizing this urgent need for preservation of such monuments, it was felt that the first step in that direction would be to locate, identify and make a proper documentation of megalithic monuments of Assam. At the same time, it was also possible to collect information regarding the rituals that are being performed while erecting these megaliths through observation and interview. I sincerely*

*hope that the findings of this project will go a long way in the preservation of both tangible and intangible cultural heritage.*

*The study would not have been possible without the financial grant from Assam Institute of Research for Tribal and Scheduled Castes, Government of Assam. We offer our sincere gratitude to the Joint Director and the entire office staff of AIRTSC, for their help and assistance.*

*We are grateful to Ms. Rami Baruah , Secretary NKBF for her untiring support all throughout the project.*

*We sincerely thank all the participants, informants who actively helped us during field work*

*Upala Barua*  
Dr. Upala Barua

CONTENTS

CHAPTER - I INTRODUCTION 01 - 28

CHAPTER - II MEGALITHIC CULTURE IN INDIA & ITS VARIOUS TYPES 29 - 42

DOCUMENTATION 43 - 52

PLATES I TO XXVII



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1: Introduction:

Megalithic tradition has attracted the interest of the scholars working in the field of anthropology and archaeology not only for the bewildering typological variation of megalithic structures but also for the ideological and socio-cultural significance associated with these structures and for their extensive spatio-temporal distribution. In archaeology, it is defined as a tomb built with prodigious rude stone or pit dug in soft rock where remains of the dead human being are kept and stones erected for commemorative or funerary purposes. Besides, graves without any lithic assemblages but by virtue of possessing certain other materials like pottery are also classified as megaliths.

V.-Gordon Childe wrote, "The term is derived from Greek words (*mega* – large and *Mhos* = stones) and is originally introduced by antiquaries to describe a fairly easily definable class of monuments in Western and Northern Europe consisting of huge undressed stones and termed in Celtic as dolmen, cromlechs and menhir" (Childe 1947). Glyn Daniel (1963), on the other hand, said, "It might be thought logical to apply the term 'megalithic' to all constructions using very large roughly dressed slabs of stones. The clapper bridge of Dartmoor, viz. are monuments and megaliths are used in some of

the Dartmoor pounds and in the field walls of Cornwall and Sicily. It is possible to find modern pigsties in Pembrokeshire, which ought to be classified as megaliths

But in archaeology it is customary to restrict the term megalithic monuments to certain specific types of construction employing these large stones – chamber tombs, rows, single standing stone, enclosures which were in the main constructed between 2000 and 1500 BC.”

## **1.2: DISTRIBUTION OF MEGALITHS:**

### **1.2.1: Megalithic cultures of india**

The term ‘megalith’ comes from two Greek words, *megas* meaning big and *lithos* meaning stone. This is actually a blanket term which incorporates different kinds of monuments built by primitive societies, all over the ancient world. They have just one thing in common- they are all made from large, roughly dressed slabs of stone. In most cases these structures were meant to house graves above the ground. The structures may be classified with reference to their forms, as *menhirs*, *orthostats*, portal tombs, gallery graves, passage graves or barrows, dolmens and cairns. Archaeological findings indicate that most of the megalithic complexes were associated with prehistoric sites and cultures. However, it should be mentioned at the outset that megaliths are not the principal markers of any homogenous and distinct culture. They reflect certain burial practices that surfaced at different times and in different regions, some of the earliest examples coming from England and Ireland. In India too megalithic cultural complexes have been discovered,

especially concentrated in the peninsular region, comprising the Vindhyan and Aravalli ranges and the Deccan plateau. Some have also been discovered in the north-western part of the subcontinent. The practice of creating megaliths still persists among certain tribal communities in Assam and Chotanagpur even today. The context of these modern – day examples provide scope for indirect ethnographic hypotheses even for pre-historic megalithic complexes in some cases. The origin of some of the burial practices dates back to a Neolithic-chalcolithic context. In fact, the style of burial changed in the first millennium B.C.E. and burials began to be located outside the habitation huts, in specially demarcated sanctuaries. Whether these early indications in some of the Neolithic-chalcolithic complexes marked the beginnings of a new paradigm of religion and philosophy leading to the later megalithic style remains in doubt however.

Three basic types of megaliths can be identified in India, viz., a) megaliths associated with chamber tombs; b) un-chambered tombs and c) megaliths not associated with burials. The chamber tombs usually consisted of a chamber composed of two or four vertical slabs of stone, topped by a horizontal capstone. If the chamber was found to be fully underground it is called a cist, if it was semi-subterranean it is called a dolmenoid cist and if it was found to be fully above the ground it is known as a dolmen.

The unchambered burials are of three types, viz., pit burials, urn burials and the sarcophagus burials. In pit burials the funerary remains were placed in a pit. Sometimes the pit was found to be marked by a circle of large stones, which is known as a pit circle. If it

is found to have a heap of large stones piled on the top it is called a cairn. If both the circle of stones and the piled-up stones are present it is known as a cairn-stone circle. A pit burial marked by a single, huge free-standing stone is known as a *menhir*. Urn burials have the funerary remains placed in an urn, while the sarcophagus burials consist of a terracotta trough, often with legs and a lid. These last two types are identified as megalithic burials even if they are not marked with stones. Burials in rock-cut caves are also counted among the megalithic burials.

Sometimes, the megaliths are not connected with burials. Some of them are simple arrangements of large stones in a geometric pattern. Their precise significance cannot be determined. Perhaps they signified memorials for the dead. Generally it is believed that they represented sacred spots for the associated society. The separation of the abode of the living from the dead signifies a shift in the belief systems of the people. However, it is rather difficult to go deeper into the religion and rituals they represented. Taken together, the megaliths are remarkably distinct from the majority of the Neolithic-chalcolithic settlements. They were generally noted to belong to a later date but sometimes they are found in a chalcolithic context. The settlement sites that can be correlated with the burials are so rare that assessments prove to be even more difficult.

The forms and styles of megalithic burials as well as the funerary practices varied from region to region. They ranged from the extended burial to fractional, post-excarate and post-cremation



burials. There are instances of burials containing the remains of more than one person. There are group-burials in family vaults. The presence of grave-goods points to a deep belief in after-life and at the same time reveals the main elements of material culture of the specific community. These mainly included weapons, pottery and ornaments. The megalithic sites of the Vindhyan region sprouted in a pre-iron chalcolithic context. The megaliths of peninsular India on the other hand, are associated with iron. Some of the sites date back to c.1300 B.C.E., while others are as late as the early centuries of the C.E.

### **1.2.2: THE NORTH AND THE NORTH-WEST**

A number of cemeteries belonging to the large prehistoric complex of the Gandhara Grave culture were located in the area of Swat, between Peshawar and Chitral, on both sides of the Hindukush Mountains. The name was coined by the noted archaeologist and historian A.H. Dani. The C14 dates for the culture indicate a time-bracket of c.1710 to 200 B.C.E. The sites mostly lay along the Swat and Dir rivers. Excavations in Dir, at Balambat and Timargarha, and in Swat at Aligrama by A.H. Dani, at Bir-kot-ghundai, Kalakoderay and Loebanr I by Giorgio Stacul suggest a homogeneous culture, represented by similar grave and burial patterns, pottery assemblages, and other artefacts. This core of Gandharan sites was found to be extended further north to Chitral by G. Stacul's brief survey and excavation in 1969, east of the Indus in 1987 and south to the vale of Peshawar by M.A. Khan in 1973. The graves are usually represented by an oblong pit, sometimes with stone-lined walls and often closed

with a stone slab. Three basic types of burials have been identified, - flexed burials, post-cremation burials like urn burial and fractional burials. The pits were often surrounded by a circle of stones. The sites reveal both single and multiple burials. A wide range of grave goods have been unearthed from the sites. These include tall goblets, pedestal cups, beakers and long, slender-necked bottles in plain, buff-red and grey ware. Crudely modelled terracotta female figurines were found in large numbers. Copper-bronze objects dominated the assemblage and iron was relatively scarce. Kalako-deray and Loebanr III contain similar bell-shaped pits, some stone paved, others containing terracottas in human and animal forms, ceramic vessels, polished stone objects, stone sickles, hammer stones, grinding stones, bone objects, and jade beads.

In the Ghalighai cave region excavated by Stacul, Phase V represents the early strata of the Gandhara Grave Culture. A number of graves strewn all over the hillside have been identified as cist burials made of vertical and horizontal stone slabs. Most of the graves indicated post-cremation burials. This phase revealed remains of rectangular stone houses and a rich collection of copper and bone objects along with a fine wheel-made pottery. Phase VI marks a shift in burial practices. Post-cremation burials were on the wane and inhumations dominated the scene.

According to a number of scholars, the Gandhara Grave Culture is one of the "four principal archaeological assemblages that document the early Iron Age in South Asia". (D.K. Chakrabarti and Praveena

Gullapalli, 1999, 154.) Traces of iron have been evident from the latest phase, i.e., the Phases III of Dani and VII of Stacul, which were chronologically in the same zone (400 to 300 B.C.E.). Thus this phase of the Gandhara Grave Culture marks the advent of the metal in the region. At Timargarha seven items of iron were recovered from the layers of this phase which comprise of spoons, spearheads and nails and most significantly, a cheek piece from a snaffle bit generally used for harnessing a horse. A considered opinion came from Karl Jettmar in 1967 that this item may be compared to some similar items from Eastern Europe belonging to the date between 7<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.E. The habitation site of Balambat in the same region yielded a more substantial evidence for iron. At Katelai small amount of iron was found at Phase V levels and at Aligrama at Phase VI level. However, going by the chronology provided by Dani and Stacul and the general evidence from most of the sites, it seems that the transition to a general use of iron can only be observed from the first millennium B.C.E. It has also been pointed out that the Gandhara Grave Culture was the first to use domesticated horse in the subcontinent.

In Kashmir, at sites like Burzahom and Gufkral the Neolithic phase merged into a megalithic phase around the middle of the second millennium BC. At Burzahom huge menhirs and a large megalithic stone circle typify this phase. The material objects retrieved from this layer consisted of grey or black burnished ware, bone and stone tools and a sprinkling of metal objects. At Gufkral, the megalithic phase is marked by fallen menhirs. A habitation complex was unearthed .A ten

cm thick floor was found with a few pits. A burnished grey ware, gritty red ware and a thick dull red ware have been recovered from the site. Apart from a large number of ring stones, copper objects dominated the scene. The quantity of bone tools decreased sharply. All the grains of the preceding period continued, while rice and millet appeared at the end of the phase. Hunting seems to have lost importance which can be deduced from the fact that the number of wild animal bones declined sharply. The bones of sheep and goats dominated the faunal remains. Traces of iron have been discovered at Gufkral.

In the Almora area of the Uttarakhand, various kinds of megalithic burials have been unearthed. Dolmens, cairns, menhirs and cists have been discovered in this area. The early cist burials in Kumaun are found in large numbers from the valleys of the tributaries of the Ganga like the Koorman, Gomti, Western Ramganga and others. They were discovered in large numbers from the Ganai, Gwaldam, Baijnath and Bageshwar areas. The structures seem to have been oriented keeping to the slope of the hill or the terrace rather than by the cardinal directions, as was also the case in the Swat valley (Stacul 1987). The large number and wide distribution of the megaliths between the Garhwal and Kumaon divisions is indicative of a long-persisting cultural tradition as D.P. Agrawal and others point out in their work. Very few artifacts have been found associated with this phase and that too only at some sites. Generally speaking the meagre cultural assemblage at a few sites include specimens of a red ware and the grey ware, bronze items reported by S.P. Dabral and



confirmed by D.P. Agrawal and others in 1991 and a common stone tool type which has been described as a rectangular sickle. The dating of the Almora Megalithic complex is not very clear and Agrawal et al provides only comparable dates based loosely on similar artifacts with the Gandhara Grave culture which is probably culturally and spatially comparable. They have also drawn linguistic and ethnographic links with the idea that the terms Kassite, Khash, Kashgar, Kashmir and Khasia could be culturally connected and mention that the main ethnographic community in Kumaon comprise of the Khasias. However, more research is required before any certain statement regarding the theory of Inner Asia Complex proposed by Jim G. Shaffer could be drawn for Kumaon megaliths too.

### **1.2.3: THE NORTHERN FRINGES OF THE VINDHYAS**

There are a number of sites marked by megaliths in the northern Vindhyas around Allahabad, Banda, Varanasi and Mirzapur districts of south-eastern Uttar Pradesh. Cairns and stone circles are the principal cultural markers of this region. Some of the graves reveal fractional burials. Alexander Cunningham first noted their presence in 1861 and subsequently in 1883 A.C.L. Carlyle explored the area and discovered burial mounds with megaliths which he identified as barrows or cairns. The location of the sites in the ecology of the Ganga plains meeting the hilly northern slopes of the Vindhyas facilitated gathering of the raw material for the structures. Three geographical groups may be identified within this zone: Group I in the Karmanasa and Chandraprabha Valleys comprising the Chakia subdivision of Varanasi District, where circular cairns covering

grave- pits have been located. A few simple slab cists have also been discovered around the Hathinia and Bhadahwan hills. These include Kakoria and Kaurihar. Kakoria has yielded the remains of a related habitation site also.

The Group II occurs around Chunar and Ahrauran in the northern part of the Mirzapur District – the geographical zone continuing from the Chakia region. About four hundred graves have been found lying between the Jirgo Dam in the north to the Chudia hills in Chunar in the south. Typologically they are similar to the first group. Five grave-pits at Panchabahani in the Jangal Mahal region have been excavated. Three major types of megaliths were identified here, viz., a) Cairns, b) Cairns with slab – cists or chambers and c) Cairns with enclosing stone circles. Four pottery types have been unearthed comprising of an ill-fired dull red ware occasionally coated with red slip; an over fired red ware, a black-slipped ware and a black and red ware. Globular pots with flaring rims characterize the red ware and bowls with various types of rims was more common in black-slipped ware. The example of the last type is to date the only one found in the south east of Ram Sarovar. It has not been excavated but it seems to be a low cairn enclosed by a circle of stones of various sizes. The type is rare in this region and more common in southern India.

Group III of megalithic complex comprises of circular cairns at a number of sites located near the Rewa – Chachai region. Kotia is one of the primary sites. At Kotia the graves contained few human skeletons, but were rather associated with animal burial. Fragments of

animal bones like the domesticated ox, sheep and pig were found in profusion in burials and these revealed clear cut marks, which suggest that they were killed before being buried. Many of the megaliths in this area are not associated with skeletal remains and probably represent memorials for the dead. Kotia has a date of c. 800 B.C.E to 300 B.C.E. Along with the typical types of pottery Kotia also yielded a dull, coarse black or grey ware with a thick fabric.

Kakoria in the Varanasi District has yielded a prominent habitation site discovered on both sides of the Chandraprabha River, situated close to a megalithic cemetery at the base of a hillock. The habitation site seems to have been related to the megalithic remains. Of the twelve graves excavated at the megalithic complex at Kakoria only three yielded human bones in very limited and fragmentary residues. It is not clear whether they were post-cremation or post-excarnate burials.

The funerary offerings include terracotta beads, microliths and surprisingly a gold bangle. Different types of pottery have been discovered both from the habitation site and the cemetery. These include Black and Red Ware, black slipped ware and red ware. Most of the pottery was wheel-made and came in the shapes of dishes, bowls, perforated vases, pedestalled cups and jars. A large number of microliths made of agate, chalcedony and chert, beads of terracotta and semi-precious stones, grinding stones and a few copper objects were also recovered from the habitation site.

Pre-iron Kakoria has an early date ranging from the second millennium B.C.E to the 7th century C.E., while the megaliths of Jangal Mahal seems to have sprouted around the beginning of the first millennium BCE. It is clear that the megaliths from the Vindhya mostly predate the coming of iron in the region as most of the megaliths of southern Uttar Pradesh reveal pre-iron layers. The only exception is found at Kotia in the Belan valley. A wide array of iron tools,- spearheads, arrowheads and sickles have been retrieved from the site.

#### **1.2.4: IRON BEARING MEGALITHIC CULTURES OF THE DECCAN**

Iron ores suitable for smelting are found all over the subcontinent barring the alluvial river plains. Archaeological enquiries give detailed and specific evidence for the advent of iron technology in the subcontinent from the 1000 B.C.E. onwards. Though evidence of iron can be traced at several chalcolithic settlements, this reflected an early, experimental stage. The large-scale use of iron in productive processes and the achievement of technological finesse in iron – working happened gradually at a later stage. Among the early iron-using centres in the subcontinent, sites in Vidarbha and Deccan can be identified without any difficulty. The earliest iron artefacts in the Deccan occur at levels associated with the Black and Red Ware and many of these are located in megalithic complexes. Several megalithic burials and associated habitation sites have been unearthed in the Maharashtra. Important sites include Takalghat-Khapa, Naikund, Mahurjhari, Ranjala etc. Naikund has an early date ranging



between 800-420 B.C.E and 785-410 B.C.E. These sites were full-fledged agricultural settlements which can be deduced from the presence of barley, rice and lentil grains on the house-floors. A wide range of copper and iron artefacts were found at the site including ladles, nails, chisels, axes, blades, fishhooks, weapons etc. It has been suggested that iron was locally smelted. The remains of a workshop with a furnace and a cylindrical terracotta pipe were discovered at Naikund. Sites like Mahurjhari had megalithic burials with rich grave goods. The site was probably an important bead-manufacturing centre. Some of these sites have a special significance as they combine habitation as well as burial sites, which is a singular feature amongst the megalithic cultures of India. Takalghat had a habitation area of about 22,500 square metres, Naikund was 100,000 square metres. In a nutshell, it can be said, that, irrespective of the precise chronological brackets for each habitation the habitation areas were fairly extensive. The demographic and economic structure seems to have been quite substantial. This is further corroborated by the recovery of a large number of burials at the same sites. For example, at Khirwada, there are almost one thousand five hundred burials adjacent to a habitation area covering 107,000 square metres. At Takalghat, there is a megalithic habitational deposit of nearly 2.5 metres along with three hundred burials. These features indicate the sedentary nature of the megalithic people of this region. This is further supported by the fact, that the megalithic people of Vidarbha were engaging in agricultural activities. Even though the iron artefacts retrieved from the sites were mostly non-agricultural tools, the sickle and the hoe did occur. Taklaghat has yielded twenty-six

adzes and a sickle. The wide variety of cultivated grains indicates an emergent agrarian subsistence pattern. A very high percentage of cattle bones among the animal bones also suggest a shift towards agrarian economy.

The material ingredients associated with the sites comprised of the diagnostic black and red pottery along with the red slipped ware and the burnished black ware in a wide variety of shapes, for daily use, storage and ritualistic purposes. Apart from iron and copper implements there are traces of a flourishing bead industry. This rich material culture presupposes a strong agrarian base to support non-agricultural artisans. P.P. Deshpande, R. Mohanty and V.S. Shinde reported on the results of the metallographical studies of a steel chisel excavated from Mahurjhari. The analysis showed clear evidence of technological advance in the form of hardening and quenching followed by tempering treatment in addition to the knowledge of steeling as early as 900 BC. At Mahurjhari and Naikund the megalithic stone circles mark human or animal burials replete with iron and copper objects. Human burials sometimes contained bones of animals. For example, at Mahurjhari a whole skeleton of a sacrificed horse was unearthed along with a human skeleton. The skeletons of warriors probably killed in a battle were traced, one with an arrow embedded in the collarbone and another with a dagger resting on his chest.

### 1.2.5: THE MEGALITHIC SITES OF SOUTH INDIA

In South India the earliest iron objects appear in connection with the megalithic sites. At most of the sites the earlier Neolithic phase overlaps with the megalithic cultural levels. In Tamil Nadu the megaliths are found in the sites of Amritamangalam, Sanur, Adichanallur, Kodumanal, Tenkasi, Kayal, Kalugumalai, etc. In Kerala, megalithic burials have been discovered in Pulimattu, Tengakkal, Muthukar, Peria Kanal, Machad, Mangadu, etc. While Machad has an early date ranging from the second century B.C.E to the second century C.E, Mangadu in Kerala has a time bracket of c.1000-100 B.C.E. Karnataka is rich in megalithic remains and important sites include Brahmagiri, Maski, Hanamsagar and Hallur, which feature prominently on the megalithic map. In the Andhra Pradesh Kadambapur, Nagarjunkonda, Gallapalli and Amravati can be identified as the major megalithic sites.

The excavation at Hallur in Karnataka in 1965 yielded the first evidence for the early use of iron connected with megalithic culture. The Period I strata was a Neolithic-chalcolithic overlap complex and this was followed by Period II which revealed Neolithic-chalcolithic and Iron Age overlaps. The Period II, according to M.S. Nagaraja Rao probably marked the advent of a new people at the site with iron arrowheads, spearheads, daggers and knife-blades. The series of radiocarbon dates place the appearance of iron at Hallur around the 1000 B.C.E. At Tadakanahalli another megalithic complex marked by four stone circles, each consisting of a cairn of stones was discovered

and excavated in 1978. Grave goods included black and red ware bowls and lids, small globular pots, pots of red ware, iron implements like heavy axes, arrowheads, spearheads, knives and dagger of iron. The occurrence of the distinctive white painted black and red ware as at Hallur also places the site at about the same date of 1000 B.C.E.

In Kerala and Karnataka the burials consist of typical chamber tombs which include the *topikal* and the *kudikal*. In the *topikals* the burial urn is placed in an underground pit and is covered by a low, convex, circular capstone. In the *kudikals* the urn is placed in a chamber constructed with four vertical slabs of stone, known as orthostats. It is capped by a huge, hemispherical capstone. In Andhra, Kerala and Karnataka menhirs also appear as important megalithic symbols. Rock-cut chambers and Topikal occur mainly in Kerala. Karnataka has passage graves. The southern part of India is also rich in dolmens, which occur in the vast tracts between the Narmada River and the Cape Comorin.

In South India the megalithic sites emerged as flourishing agricultural communities supplemented by large scale fishing, hunting and stock-breeding. The subsistence pattern of the people at these sites can also be deduced to some extent from the paintings and the figurines. For example, at Marayur and Attala in Kerala and at some of the sites in Karnataka hunting scenes were depicted. Bones of wild animals as well as of domesticated animals like cow, sheep and dog appear in profusion, corroborating the pictorial evidence. This phenomenon



certainly indicates a continuity of earlier subsistence patterns of the Neolithic-chalcolithic phase.

The Belgaum districts megalithic sites in the region of Saundatti on a gorge created by the Malaprabha River has yielded evidence for a number of dolmenoid cists, discovered in 1951 by R.V. Joshi. More remarkably at Tallur a habitation site was discovered near a megalithic burial site by A. Sundara in 1975. The megaliths were passage chamber varieties and, round barrows containing human burials. Grave goods included black and red, bright red and dull red pottery, conch shells pierced with holes probably used for necklace, pieces of iron. The continuation of the burial site in historical period is attested by the presence of the russet coated and white painted pottery which belongs to the historic stage. Sundara had discovered interesting etchings of geometric types on a menhir like stone in this area associated also with black and red ware and red ware of megalithic links. Sundara interpreted the symbol to represent something akin to the Naga Mandala symbol found in later-day context in the Karnataka.

The main crops ranged from different kinds of pulses and millets to cereals. Though ragi, horse gram and green gram appear as major crops, in Coorg and Khapa in Karnataka rice husk can be definitely found. In a tomb in Kunnatur (Tamil Nadu), traces of rice grains could be detected. Another feature of the south Indian megalithic sites is the recovery of a large number of grinding stones and pestles. These were also found inside the graves. All these point to

intensifying agricultural activity suggesting a shift towards sedentary occupations. In a recent study it has been shown that the megalithic sites of Tamil Nadu were often located alongside rain-fed irrigation tanks.

The megalithic sites of South India yield ample evidence regarding specialized craft activities. Different kinds of pottery have been unearthed, including the diagnostic Black and Red Ware. Some decorative shapes are distinctive, like the lidded pot moulded in the form of some animal or bird. The graves are replete with beads of various kinds. Copper and bone artefacts and a sprinkling of gold and silver objects occur at most of the sites. But at the majority of the sites iron objects outnumber the objects made of other metals. The wide-spread use of iron in everyday life is clearly attested by the discovery of iron utensils, weapons, carpentry tools and agricultural implements. Certain technological skills were mastered to harness iron to the process of production. Extremely high temperatures had to be attained for successful smelting of iron. There is evidence of iron smelting in certain sites like the site of Paiyampalli in Karnataka. At Machad, an analysis of the iron artefacts shows very small traces of impurities, indicating great efficiency achieved in smelting of iron which required great skill in pyrotechnology and knowledge of the metal. The usual practice of manufacturing was to forge thin metal strips, which were then joined together by hammering them. Some of the copper and bronze objects were cast into moulds, while some others were simply beaten into shape.

The earliest phase of megalithic activity in Karnataka is represented by the passage chamber tombs in the north western part of Karnataka between the Krishna and the Malaprabha rivers. This is based on the hypothesis that iron technology and megalithic constructions were introduced into the peninsula from further north via the western coast of India. Other megalithic types further south indicate an evolution of the passage chamber tombs and the emergence of a separate line of development. This development probably originated in the earlier Neolithic-chalcolithic sites taking shape in different forms like the cairns, pits, and pit-circles, especially noted in the Shorapur-Raichur Doab where Neolithic cultures had flourished in earlier times. In Tamil Nadu *dolmenoid cists* with portholes and the *transepted cists* with a passage probably evolved from the earlier megalithic types of eastern and northern Karnataka. Other forms of urn burials may be late developments within Tamil Nadu itself.

It has been inferred that the megalithic builders represent only a minority of the population in Tamil Nadu in the first millennium representing mobile groups who gradually settled down. Early Tamil poetry refers to certain modes of disposal of the dead which can be correlated with archaeological evidence from the megalithic complexes. The poetical works also describe warlike pastoral tribes in certain areas of peninsular India, which can be corroborated by the archaeological finds of a large number of iron weapons. There may not have been specialized pastoralism but rather mixed farming which involved dry season movement out of the village base with the flock.

Sites like Adichanallur in Tamil Nadu emerge with extensive area of urn burial site, covering almost a hundred and fourteen acres. A multifaceted material culture reveals something more than simple seasonal camps of the mobile people. The burial urns were placed singly or sometimes in pairs in pits excavated in the solid rock or the gravelly soil. In most cases a selected number of bones were interred. Domestic utensils were found in the urns and outside them. Many of them contained rice husk. A wide range of metal objects has been retrieved, mostly made of iron.

The archaeologists have begun to suggest that the megalithic cemeteries of the peninsula mark places of special economic significance. In Karnataka the site of Brahmagiri has a habitational area adjacent to specific cultural markers like the megalithic cist or the chamber tomb with a porthole. The prolific quantity of iron objects recovered from the site pinpoint access to a fine quality of iron ore. Maski and Brahmagiri were actually situated on prominent early historical trade routes as underlined by the location of the Asokan edicts. They might have been early centres of craft production linked to burgeoning networks of exchange. Inscriptions of the later period refer to skill of the ironsmiths in this region. The site of Kodumanal in the Cera territory was rich in precious stones like crystal, sapphire and beryl. The area is dotted with megaliths and has a string of coin hoard sites that mark the major west to east route from Coimbatore to Karur, the earliest capital city of the Pandyas. The presence of the horse in the south Indian megalithic sites suggests an extensive network. Supply of horse flowed from northern

and western India. Such connections with the Vidarbha region in the north are also attested. The copper and copper alloy artefacts recovered from Adichchanallur and Kodumanal show similarities in designs in some of the objects to the copper artefacts exposed at Mahurjhari in Deccan. This indicates a possible trading connection with this distant site. Control over exchange was probably controlled by the heads of clans, who were buried under the megalithic markers. Thus there was a connection between burial and status.

Few megalithic graves contain bones of children and there is a very high percentage of adult male burials. The same burial area continued to be used for centuries. The south Indian megaliths overlapped with the early historical layers. It seems that the graves were not used more than once or twice in a generation. They probably represent the site of burial for a small elite group within a ranked society.

The construction of the megaliths must have involved community endeavour. Yet there are few settlements connected with the megalithic sites. If the area demarcated for burials was associated with status and continuity it could well be situated at some distance from the habitations. The occurrence of Roman coins around Karur and Madurai at the top levels possibly provide a terminal date for the sites and suggests the range of economic networks in which the local societies were involved.

### 1.2.6: NORTH-EAST INDIA

The examples of Megaliths from the north-eastern states provide data on living or recently extinct megalithic traditions among the tribes of the subcontinent. Therefore, the megalithic culture of the rest of the subcontinent cannot be temporally or culturally linked with this complex. Throughout the whole of the eastern Indian hilly region between the valley of Assam and the plains of Sylhet, comprising the modern states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura an archaeological complex can be identified where megalithic monuments occur in profusion. The largest concentration is found in the Khasia and Jaintia hills, with important sites like Laitkor, Unistow, Nartiang, Nongkrem etc. A sprinkling of such sites can also be seen in the Angami area of Nagaland, Naga inhabited areas of Manipur, the Mikir and Cachar hills. The dating of these monuments proves to be an uphill task for the researchers as some of the monuments definitely belong to the prehistoric age but the others are embedded in the contemporary local culture. The continuity of these practices makes the dating more problematic.

The modes of disposal of the dead vary according to region and local customs. The Khasia hills yield evidence for elaborate stone structures mostly alignments and *menhirs*, *dolmens* being comparatively rare. Sometimes the urn containing the ash is placed in little circular cells with flat tops. The *menhirs* were generally erected in the memory of the ancestors. In the Naga area the dead are interred and several types of megalithic formations are created as markers. In the Angami area the dead is buried below the level of the ground and

it is marked by a stone and earth erection. In the Mikir hills, on the other hand, we come across *menhirs*, alignments and *dolmens*.

The sheer size of these monuments stuns the archaeologists. The *menhirs* are mostly erected as memorial stones. In Nartiang the huge structures sometimes measure eight metres in height and eighty centimetres in thickness. The largest dolmens are in Nartiang and Laitkor with the table stone measuring about 30 ft 4 inches by 10 ft. in breadth and an average thickness of one foot. As the monuments are yet to be located in their specific cultural contexts, the material culture of the people is difficult to trace. However, unlike the southern part of the country, these sites cannot be associated with iron. The heterogeneity of burial practices suggest that megalithic burials do not constitute a single culture but settlements with cultural habits having similarities in concepts even though they were not identical in form.

**1.3: EARLIER WORKS ON MEGALITHS IN NORTHEAST INDIA:** Though the megalithic monuments and custom prevalent in different parts of India have been systematically recorded and exhaustively studied through exploration and excavation, there has been less effort on the part of scholars working in Northeastern part of India to study the same. It was in fact the British scholar, administrators and missionaries posted in this region who had shown interest in different archaeological resources of Northeast India including the megaliths since the later part of the nineteenth century. A number of scholars have left account on the megalithic monuments

of this region. Godwin-Austen made a pioneering effort to focus on the stone monuments of Khasi hills way back in 1872. He also made a survey on the stone monuments of Naga tribes along with some remarks on their custom of megalithic erection. C.B. Clarke (1874) also made an attempt to record methodically the stone monuments of Northeast India. During the early part of the current century, Hutton tried to throw light on the meaning and method of erection of megaliths by the Naga tribes besides leaving account on the Khasi megaliths. Hutton also tried to record the megalithic monuments as well as rock cut engravings and neolithic celts discovered in North Cachar Hills of Assam. (Hutton 1922, 1926 and 1929). During the later decades Haimendorf highlighted the different aspects of the megaliths of erstwhile Assam through his writings and also discussed in length about the problems of origin and diffusion of the megaliths of Northeast and Middle India (Haimendorf 1945, 1964). David Roy's attempt to record systematically the ritualistic aspects and ceremonial words chanted during the course of megalithic erection among the Khasis is considered as a significant attempt (David Roy 1963). Besides the above scholars, a number of other scholars, a number of other scholars tried to focus on the megalithic tradition in different regions of Northeast India during their academic course of study. Noted among them is A. Bareh (1981) whose M.Phil dissertation deals in details about the megalithic tradition among the Khasis in the setting of a village. Namita Sadap Sen (1981) also wrote a full length chapter on the megaliths of Khasi-Jayantia territory in her published Ph.D. thesis titled 'The Origin and Early of the Khasi-Synteng' in order to reconstruct the culture-history of the Khasis.



P.Binodini Devi (1993) and J.J.Waty (1997) were two other research scholars who studied the megalithic tradition of Manipur and Nagaland respectively for fulfillment of the Ph.D. degree of Gauhati University. While P. Binodini recorded the megalithic remains of Manipur and beliefs associated with it; J.J. Watty made an attempt to study the ethno-archaeological aspects of the megalithic tradition of the Nagas. S.N. Rao (1993), B.Mutum (2002) and M.B. Singh (1997) also made novel attempt to study the megalithic tradition prevalent among different communities of Northeast India from a modern perspective. S.N. Rao's attempt to explore the socio-ideological aspects of the megalithic custom prevalent among the Nagas and Khasis is considered to be of immense academic importance. The 19 megalithic remains of Karbi Anglong district of Assam has not been systematical studied by any scholar except occasional references made by P.C.Chaudhury (Chaudhury 1959) and N.If Chaudhury (Chaudhury 1985). D.K Medhi has highlighted the megalithic remains of Western Karbi Anglong in his article on archaeological research in Karbi Anglong (Medhi 2000). The present author has also tried to record the living megalithic practices among the Karbis in the report submitted to Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development under the Junior Short Fellowship, 1997, 1.4. Aims and Objectives of the present study: Karbi Anglong is one of the interior most regions of Northeast India in Assam covered with high hills and thick forest. It is politically an autonomous unit and geographically marked by two distinct divisions- the one that of Diphu and Bokajan sub-divisions and the other the Jalamreng subdivisions, both being separated by the plain regions of Nagaon district. The Diphu and

Bokajan subdivisions are bordered by the Naga Hills whereas the Ilamren subdivision is bordered by the Khasi-Jayantia and North Cachar Hills. The region has remained archaeologically almost unknown. However, systematic investigations carried out in the recent years have resulted in the detection of a number of megalithic sites. The importance of this region as far as megaliths is concerned lies in the fact that it is bordered by Khasi-Jayantia hills on the western periphery and N.C. Hills and Nagaland in Southwestern boundaries which are already famous for megalithic remains and megalithic 20 erection is a surviving example of a primitive tradition among the Khasis, Nagas and a section of the Karbis. Though the megalithic tradition in other parts of Northeast India have systematically been recorded and studied, the megalithic ruins of this region remain yet to be recorded. Moreover, considering the fact that a section of the Karbis living in the plains of Assam still practice it as a post-cremation commemorative ritual; it is academically important to record these structures and the living practice before these get lost in course of time. A study of these ruins and the living practice in the context of Karbi-culture and form an anthropo-archaeological perspective may be fruitful in drawing some conclusions regarding early migration, settlement, dynamics of culture contact and culture change of the Karbis and the place of the Karbi-megaliths in the great megalithic complex of Eastern India.

### 1.5. Methods Applied for the study:

Fieldwork is an indispensable part of any anthropological study. Fieldwork for the present study was carried out in Karbi Anglong district of Assam in different trips made during the period from 1998 to 2001. Besides Karbi Anglong, the plain districts of

Assam mainly Kamrup, Nagaon, Morigaon and the adjoining states of Meghalaya and Nagaland were also visited. Standard archaeological methods of exploration were adopted to record the megalithic ruins and physical environment of the sites located in different remote areas of Karbi Anglong. Moreover, ethnographic methods of interview and nonparticipant observation were applied to gather relevant data

#### **1.4: Aims and Objectives of the present study:**

The main objective of the present study was to document the major megalithic monuments that are located in geo-cultural different settings having tribal settlements in the vicinity at present or in the past.

The following are the subsidiary objectives:

- i) To identify the megalithic site in and around the Karbi dominated areas.
- ii) To collect the history of the site.
- iii) To document the sites with photographs.
- iv) To prepare report giving details of the sites.

#### **1.5. Methods Applied for the study:**

Fieldwork is an indispensable part of any anthropological study. Fieldwork for the present study was carried out in Karbi Anglong district of Assam in different trips made during the period from 1998 to 2001. Besides Karbi Anglong, the plain districts of Assam mainly Kamrup, Nagaon, Morigaon and the adjoining states of Meghalaya and Nagaland were also visited. Standard archaeological methods of exploration were adopted to record the megalithic ruins and physical

environment of the sites located in different remote areas of Karbi Anglong. Moreover, ethnographic methods of interview and nonparticipant observation were applied to gather relevant data.

---

## CHAPTER-II

### MEGALITHIC CULTURE IN INDIA & ITS VARIOUS TYPES

#### Megalithic Culture in India:

Megalithic tradition in India is known to have existed in different parts of India as mentioned earlier. However, in no parts of India, the megalithic culture has been studied such exhaustively and megalithic lifeways reconstructed through excavation as in South India. A great number of scholars have worked on the megaliths of South India and in fact the megaliths in India were first discovered by Branfill (1818) in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh followed by the discovery of similar structures in Malabar of Kerala by Babington (1823). Mortimer Wheeler conducted excavation at the site of Brahmagiri and Chandra-vallie in 1944 and on the basis of his finding; he tried to place the South Indian megaliths in chronological framework. Among others who made pioneering a study on the megaliths of South India are Taylor (1851), Mackenzie (1873), Brecks (1873), Burgess (1874), Cordington (1930) and Krishnaswami (1949). The South Indian megalithic culture is associated with Iron Age weapons as well as pottery (mainly black and red ware) recovered through systematic excavation and analysis of megalithic graves. Sepulchral varieties occur more frequently in South India comprising of such structures as pit-burials, urn-burials and chamber burials. Unearthing of a large amount of zoo archaeological as well as archaeobotanical evidences together with Iron Age weapons and pottery have led to the reconstruction of megalithic culture of South India consisting the

states of Maharashtra, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Moorti (1994) thus ascribes an agro-pastoral mode of subsistence for South Indian megalithic society characterized by cereal, and pulse production. Reddy (1991) classifies the megaliths of India into two broad divisions - the South India megaliths belonging to a comparatively a past period and megaliths in Assam, Bihar and Orissa where they are memorials to the dead and practiced by tribes such as Nagas, Khasis, Garos, Gadabas, Bondos, Gonds and others. He terms the East India tradition of erecting as *living megalithism*. Besides South India; megaliths also occur in the north and northwest parts of Indian sub-continent in Kashmir, Punjab, Sind, Gujrat, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. These consist of large stone cist without porthole as reported by Wheeler (1960) about 30 km northeast of Karachi near Murad Memon. Cists with Cairns and stone circles were reported from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and near Delhi and Mirzapur and Ladakh area bordering Tibet (Carlleyle 1883, Le Mesurier, 1867; Cunningham, 1871). A large number of megaliths mainly cairn circles have been discovered in the Vindhyas covering parts of the districts of Varanasi, Allahabad, Mirzapur and Banda - all in southeastern Uttar Pradesh due to the efforts of Singh (1985), Sharma (1985), Pant (1985) and their associates. De Terra and Paterson reported a group of standing stones near Srinagar in 1936.

Megalithic custom is prevalent among the tribes of central India and Orissa and this is reported to have survived as a living practice among certain communities in the region. Haimendorf (1945) records that the Bastar Gonds, Hill Maria, Bison-horn Marias, Dorlas and Murias

erect Menhirs (*uraskal*) and sometimes also dolmen (*danyakal*) as memorial to the dead and the erection is generally accompanied by feast and the sacrifice of a cow and bullock. Among the Mundas of Chota Nagpur; large stone slab cover certain graves and dolmen supported by smaller stones serving as family burial place where bones of the family member are buried. Other Munda speaking tribes and Hos also have identical megalithic practice. The Gadabas, Bondus and Keenghar of Orissa have the tradition of erecting Menhirs, stone circles and dolmens for commemorative and funerary purposes. Stone erection with a feast of merit is reported among the Gadabas. Similarly, Keenghars erect Menhirs when the head of the village dies. Besides stones, some tribes also erect wooden post. Thus the of Hyderabad erect a temporary forked post on the place where the memorial feast is performed and the sacrificial cows are invariably tied to thes . Square wooden posts are also erected by Korkus of West central India and Raj Gonds of Hyderabad in course of the memorial feast of the dead individual. Large stone slabs locally known as *sasandri* cover certain graves and like the dolmens supported by smaller stones serve as family burial place where parts of the bones of the family members are buried in the course of a second funeral; menhirs locally known as *hidiri* are set alongside the sasandri the graves or in other places along the village roads. Northeast India occupies a prominent place in the archaeological map of the world because of its rich megalithic remains. It is one of the few places in the world where this practice has survived as a living practice. Realising the significance of Northeast Indian megaliths, J.P. Mills (1933) writes, "An ethnoarchaeological of Assam of worldwide

fame is its wealth of megaliths. Indeed it is one of the few places in the world where monuments of type are still erected." Although none of the megalithic structures of Northeast India has yet been dated, it is agreed by scholars that the custom of erection of megaliths prevailed in Northeast India from the prehistoric period (Clarke 1874). In Northeast India, megaliths are distributed through a wide territory across the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, the hill districts of North Cachar and Karbi Anglong and the plain areas of Nagaon, Morigaon and Kamrup districts of Assam. Megaliths in North Cachar hills are reported to occur at Nenglo, Bolasam, Kobak, Derebora and Kartong (Mills and Hutton 1929). T.C. Sharma (1984) opines that the greatest concentration of megaliths in Northeast India is observed in the Khasi and Jaintia hills districts of Meghalaya and that the region houses some of the largest pieces of menhirs as at Nartiang where lies a huge menhir measuring 8.1m high and 75 cm feet thick. Some of the large megaliths fields in Meghalaya occur at Cherapunji, Maollong, Lailong, Kote, Laitkor, Jowai and Nartiang (Godwin Austen 1872: Gurdon 1914). The Khasi megaliths are significant not only for varied structures but also for the socio-ideological significance associated with them. S.N.Rao (1991) classifies the Khasi megaliths into two broad groups namely, A)Funerary Stones and B) Memorial Stones. The funerary stones-are those which are directly associated with the post-cremation ritual including the disposal of the mortal remains of the deceased body. The clansmen or anyone to commemorate an event of public interest - social, political, ideological and others, on



the other hand, puts up memorial stones. Various types of Khasi funerary megaliths as reported by him are:

1. *Mawkymoh* or *mawphew*. A small stone burial cist for the individual which is put up in one's garden or a hillock on the out-skirts of the village.
2. *Mawkynroh*: A stone cist of the family built either in the garden or in the open outside but not far from the house.
3. *Mawabah* or *Mawaniom*: It is the rectangular clan tomb built on the ground with parallel-sided slabs covered with a massive single flat slab.
4. *Mawlynti*: Three upright stones planted on the way leading to the tomb. The tallest middle upright stone is called *mawkni* or maternal uncle.
5. *Kpep*: Rough slabs arranged in a circle or an alignment near the *mawaniam* that serve as sacred place of worship for the clan members.
6. *Mawaibam*: These are a set of three menhirs with a slab in front, smaller in size, are put up one day after the ceremonial deposition of bones in the clan tomb.
7. *Mawksing*, *Mawkhail* or *Mawjcv*. A set of five menhirs erected by the clan members along the path, one or two years after the bones have been placed in the *mawniyam*. The central stone is called, uncle stone *mawkni*.
8. *Mawbynna*: This is another set of five menhirs, with a flat table-stone in front, erected by the relatives of the deceased, when the bones are deposited directly in the clan tomb.

Similarly the memorial stones are classified as:

1. *Mausmai*: This stone was erected at a place named after it in memory of a peace settlement. After the feuds between the

people of Cherra and Mausmai village, the people made peace and swore by the stone that they put up.

2. *Mau-in-lu*: The stone of the salt.
3. *Mau-Jlong*: The grassy stone. ,
4. *Mau-mlu*: 1 he upturned stone.

Among the Oaros, the megalithic practice is found in a modified form.

Instead of stone structure, the Garos erect carved wooden post-called *Kima* in honour of the dead (Playfair 1909). Various sections of the Naga tribes like the

Ao, Angaini, Sema, Maram, Rengma, Kanyak and others are known to be associated with this practice. S.N. Rao classifies the megaliths of Nagas into funerary and memorial stones similarly to the Khasis. The the Angamis divide the commemorative stones into four categories (Hutton, 1926) as

1. *Dahu*: Rectangular pyramidal building, which the clan can use as a vantage point in a riot with another clan.
2. *Tehuba*: a raised level space for dancing, surrounded by separate point on which men can sit.
3. *Kwehu*: Memorials to the dead, built in the form of a mound of earth leveled at the top and surmounted with a circular wall and sometimes paved with stone over the top.
4. *Baze*: It is rectangular stone platform usually with steps up to it and stone seats round the top. Hutton assumes this to be

associated with a water tank. Among this, *Kwehu* and *Baze* are identified both as memorial and graves.

The dominant megalithic types recorded from the North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong and plain districts of Assam are menhirs, dolmenoid menhir and alignments. Besides monoliths with engravings of different shapes are reported from N.C. Cachar Hills. Heine-Geldern (1928) attributes the introduction of megaliths into Eastern India to the Austroasiatic element of the Munda people. He believes that these must have entered India in waves some time before the Aryan occupied the valley of the Ganga, perhaps between 2500 and 1200 BC. Coming up against a pre-Aryan copper using culture which diverted them to their present habitat in the hills south of the Ganga plains. The migration is also suggested to be associated with the diffusion of the Neolithic shouldered adze. Walter Ruben (1939) inclines to view that the custom of constructing megalithic reached India, by way of Palestine and Persia in the early Iron age and one of its branches moved eastwards as far as Chota Nagpur and the other moved into Southern India. He believed that the ancient Asian tombs and the megalithic culture of the Mundas had a western origin and spread from there during the iron age further eastward Assam. Haimendorf (1945), however, believes that the megalithic complex found in Assam and many parts of Southeastern Asia appeared not as an accidental aggregation of various cultural elements but as a well-coordinated system of custom and beliefs, a philosophy of life and nature.

On the basis of structure and function, megaliths can be classified in the



following heads:

- i) *Menhir*: These are single piece of stone erected vertically with one end buried under the ground. Also known as memorial stones, sometimes these are nicely trimmed. Common types in eastern and northeastern parts of India.
- ii) *Dolmen*: These stone structures are erected by placing few pieces of stones on the ground and then placing a stone slab upon these stones. Generally remains of the dead are buried under the stone structure for which such megaliths are termed as graves or tombs.
- iii) *Cist*: Coffin boxes were made out of stone slabs in certain cases for burying the bones of the deceased persons called cist. Sometimes these boxes have a big hole at one end and termed as porthole.
- iv) *Alignment*: Sometimes Menhirs are erected in linear pattern with an ally between two lines of stones. Such structures are termed as alignment.
- v) *Cromlech*: In certain cases Menhirs are erected in such a fashion that forms a circle. Such circular tombstone consisting of Menhirs are known as cromlechs.
- vi) *Cairns*: Stone heaps erected as memorials for marking an event. Sometimes cists are also with stone heaps.
- vii) *Passage Graves*: Such graves are prepared by placing pieces of stones on both sides of a path and then placing stone slabs on them. On one end of the passage, there remains the entrance and on the other end the grave.

U.S. Moorti (1994), however, simplifies this classification by making two broad categories viz. i) Sepulchral monuments and ii) Non-sepulchral monuments. According to him, the first category is essentially a burial proper consisting of such structures as pit-burials,

chamber burials, legged burials and unlegged urn-burials and the second category consists of structures like dolmen, menhir, stone-alignment and port-hole dolmen (closed chamber) which are commemorative in nature. Moorti's classification is, however, based mainly on his study of South Indian megalithic culture. Similarly, Reddy (1991) makes the following classification of the megaliths:

- i) *Menhirs*: A single dressed or undressed standing stone with its base driven into the ground.
- ii) *Alignments*: These consist of a numbers of menhirs erected in lines in particular order.
- iii) *Avenues*: These-consist of two or more alignments, which lie roughly parallel to each other.
- iv) *Barrows*: These are earthen mounds over the surface of which occur chips of granite. The pit covered by the barrow contains urns or terracotta legged sacrophagus.
- v) *Cairns*: These are nothing but heaped-up mounds of stone rubbles.
- vi) *Cairn Circle*: The structure comprises a circle of stones around the cairn, which is placed on a single or multiple urns or terracotta legged sacrophagus.
- vii) *Cist*: It is a an underground box like structure rectangular in plan made of two long vertical slabs, and one or two short horizontal slabs driven into the ground with a flat slab and with or without a roof slab. One of the sides called ojthostat sometimes possesses a circular, semi-circular or trapezoidal hole, which is known as porthole.
- viii) *Dolmens*: These structures are roughly square or quadrangular in plan consisting of several upright orthostatic slabs erected on the natural ground level to

support a solitary flat slab of stone or two, which cover the space or chamber below it.

- ix) *Dolmenoid cists*: According to Krishnaswami (1949), these structures are burial chambers made of multiple stones for the sides and top with single or double stone circles around them.
- x) *Umbrella stones*: These consist of a circular laterite capstone in the form of a low and solid dome resting on four inwardly leaning and tapering stones about 1.2 m in height. The stones at the base join to form a square with a diagonal approaching the diameter of the capstone.
- xi) *Hood stones*: These are dome-shaped, dressed lateritic stones similar to the cap of the umbrella stones but their flat under surface directly rests on the ground.
- xii) *Rock-cut caves*: The Rock-cut caves are nothing but burial caves cut into the lateritic rock. They form an oblong or circular structure with a vaulted dome.

**Works on megaliths in northeast India:** Though the megalithic monuments and custom prevalent in different parts of India have been systematically recorded and exhaustively studied through exploration and excavation, there has been less effort on the part of scholars working in Northeastern part of India to study the same. It was in fact the British scholar, administrators and missionaries posted in this region who had shown interest in different archaeological resources of Northeast India including the megaliths since the later part of the nineteenth century. A number of scholars have left account on the megalithic monuments of this region. Godwin-Austen made a pioneering effort to focus on the stone monuments of Khasi hills way

back in 1872. He also made a survey on the stone monuments of Naga tribes along with some remarks on their custom of megalithic erection. C.B. Clarke (1874) also made an attempt to record methodically the stone monuments of Northeast India. During the early part of the current century, Hutton tried to throw light on the meaning and method of erection of megaliths by the Naga Earlier tribes besides leaving account on the Khasi megaliths. Hutton also tried to record the megalithic monuments as well as rock cut engravings and neolithic celts discovered in North Cachar Hills of Assam. (Hutton 1922, 1926 and 1929). During the later decades Haimendorf highlighted the different aspects of the megaliths of erstwhile Assam through his writings and also discussed in length 18 about the problems of origin and diffusion of the megaliths of Northeast and Middle India (Haimendorf 1945, 1964). David Roy's attempt to record systematically the ritualistic aspects and ceremonial words chanted during the course of megalithic erection among the Khasis is considered as a significant attempt (David Roy 1963). Besides the above scholars, a number of other scholars, a number of other scholars tried to focus on the megalithic tradition in different regions of Northeast India during their academic course of study. Noted among them is A. Bareh (1981) whose M.Phil dissertation deals in details about the megalithic tradition among the Khasis in the setting of a village. Namita Sadap Sen (1981) also wrote a full length chapter 'on the megaliths of Khasi-Jayantia territory in her published Ph.D. thesis titled 'The Origin and Early of the Khasi-Synteng' in order to reconstruct the culture-history of the Khasis. P.Binodini Devi (1993) and J.J.Waty (1997) were two other research scholars who

studied the megalithic tradition of Manipur and Nagaland respectively for fulfillment of the Ph.D. degree of Gauhati University. While P. Binodini recorded the megalithic remains of Manipur and beliefs associated with it; J.J. Watty made an attempt to study the ethno-archaeological aspects of the megalithic tradition of the Nagas. S.N. Rao (1993), B.Mutum (2002) and M.B. Singh (1997) also made novel attempt to study the megalithic tradition prevalent among different communities of Northeast India from a modern perspective. S.N. Rao's attempt to explore the socio-ideological aspects of the megalithic custom prevalent among the Nagas and Khasis is considered to be of immense academic importance. The 19 megalithic remains of Karbi Anglong district of Assam has not been systematical studied by any scholar except occasional references made by P.C.Chaudhury (Chaudhury 1959) and N.If Chaudhury (Chaudhury 1985). D.K Medhi has highlighted the megalithic remains of Western Karbi Anglong in his article on archaeological research in Karbi Anglong (Medhi 2000). The present author has also tried to record the living megalithic practices among the Karbis in the report submitted to Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development under the Junior Short Fellowship, 1997, 1.4. Aims and Objectives of the present study: Karbi Anglong is one of the interior most regions of Northeast India in Assam covered with high hills and thick forest. It is politically an autonomous unit and geographically marked by two distinct divisions- the one that of Diphu and Bokajan sub-divisions and the other the Llamren subdivisions, both being separated by the plain regions of Nagaon district. The Diphu and Bokajan subdivisions are bordered by the Naga Hills whereas the



Ilamren subdivision is bordered by the Khasi-Jayantia and North Cachar Hills. The region has remained archaeologically almost unknown. However, systematic investigations carried out in the recent years have resulted in the detection of a number of megalithic sites. The importance of this region as far as megaliths is concerned lies in the fact that it is bordered by Khasi-Jayantia hills on the western periphery and N.C. Hills and Nagaland in Southwestern boundaries which are already famous for megalithic remains and megalithic 20 erection is a surviving example of a primitive tradition among the Khasis, Nagas and a section of the Karbis. Though the megalithic tradition in other parts of Northeast India have systematically been recorded and studied, the megalithic ruins of this region remain yet to be recorded. Moreover, considering the fact that a section of the Karbis living in the plains of Assam still practice it as a post-cremation commemorative ritual; it is academically important to record these structures and the living practice before these get lost in course of time. A study of these ruins and the living practice in the context of Karbi-culture and form an anthropo-archaeological perspective may be fruitful in drawing some conclusions regarding early migration, settlement, dynamics of culture contact and culture change of the Karbis and the place of the Karbi-megaliths in the great megalithic complex of Eastern India.

### 1.5. Methods Applied for the study:

Fieldwork is an indispensable part of any anthropological study. Fieldwork for the present study was carried out in Karbi Anglong district of Assam in different trips made during the period from 1998 to 2001. Besides Karbi Anglong, the plain districts of Assam mainly Kamrup, Nagaon, Morigaon and the adjoining states of

Meghalaya and Nagaland were also visited. Standard archaeological methods of exploration were adopted to record the megalithic ruins and physical environment of the sites located in different remote areas of Karbi Anglong. Moreover, ethnographic methods of interview and nonparticipant observation were applied to gather relevant data.

---

## DOCUMENTATION

### Part-I

#### Distribution of Megaliths In Dimoria: Kamrup Metro) District Plates I- VII

It has been already stated that the megaliths in Dimoria though mostly concentrated in the hilly region, are also found in the foothills and in the plain areas also. Their distribution pattern, in terms of the quality, varies from place to place. As a matter in some villages huge cluster of megaliths are noticed and in some other places these are thinly distributed. In Dimoria these are found in Barkashrang, Barkuchi, Batakuchi, Bhogpur, Chenimur, Dakhinban, Dakhin Topatuli, Dharbam, Digaru, Dwarakakuchi, Kalangpur, Khamar, Latabari, Magursila, Marakdola, Nakuchi, Panbari, Pashamsur, Tegheria and Upper Falling villages. Out of those twenty villages twelve villages are situated in hillarea and rest are in the plain area. It has already been stated that on the basis of structure, both menhir and table stone of the study area are divided into two types, (a) *long-ex* and *long-em* and (b) *cheng-ex* and *cheng-en*, respectively. Villagewise description will provide a transparent idea about the shape, size, number, etc. of the megaliths of the study area.

#### Barkashrang Village

Barkashrang is a homogeneous village inhabited by the Karbis. The village is 1.25 km. in length and 1 km. across. It is situated 20 km. away from the number 37 national highway (for details of the physical position of the study villages, see table 6). Twenty five per cent of the people of this village have adopted Christianity before ten years; rest of people are still adhered to their pristine animistic faith. There are 531 (18.38%) megaliths in Barkashrang village, among which 290 (19.42%) are menhir and 241 (18.37%) are table stone. It is pertinent to note here that all the menhirs of the village are *long-ex* type and rest are *cheng-ex* type. Megaliths of Barkashrang are found in and

around the habitational area of the village.

### **Barkuchi Village**

Barkuchi is a homogeneous village inhabited by the Karbis only. The village is 1 km. in length and 0.75 km. across. It is situated 7 km. away from Sonapur. There are 25 (1.24 %) megaliths in Barkuchi village, among which 13 (0.87%) are menhirs including 1 (100%) big menhir and 11 (0.83%) are table stones. It is pertinent to note here that all the menhirs of the village are *tong-e*, and *long-ea* type and rest are *cheng-ex* type. Megaliths of Barkuchi are found in and around the habitational area of the village. The height of these menhirs varies from 1.6 m. to 3.5 m. and the breadth varies from 0.5 m. to 1.0m.

### **Batakuchi Village**

Batakuchi is a village situated in the plain area inhabited by the Karbis. The village is 1.30 km. in length 1.2 km. across. It is situated 15 km. away from the national highway no. 37 which is inhabited by the Karbis only. There are 25 (0.86%) megaliths in Batakuchi village, among which 7 (0.47%) are menhir of *long-et* type and 18 are table stones. Among the table stones 7 (0.53%) are *cheng-ej* and 11 (13.41%) are *cheng-e*,,. All the megaliths of Batakuchi village are found more or less in the centre of the village. The height of the menhirs of Batakuchi village varies from 1.3 m. to 1.7 m. while the breadth varies from 0.7 m. to 0.8 m.

### **Bhogpur Village**

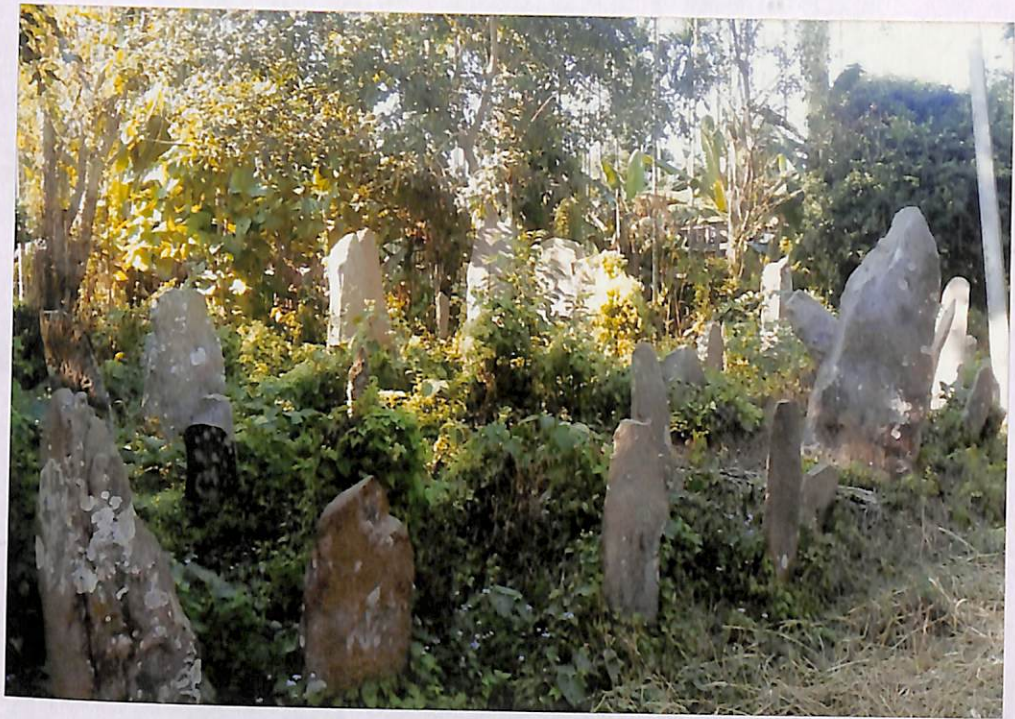
Bhogpur is a heterogeneous village inhabited by the Karbis (55%), the Assamese caste Hindus, the Bodos and the Rabhas. The village is 1.30 km. in length and 1.5 km. across. It is situated in the plains area, 5 km. away from the national highway no. 37. Megaliths of Bhogpur village are found in and around the habitational area of the village. There are 48 (1.66%) megaliths in Bhogpur village, among which 23 (1.54%) are menhir and 25 (1.90%) are table stone.

The height of the menhirs of the village varies from 1.7 m. to 1.9 m. while the breadth ranges from 0.60 m. to 0.70 m. All the menhirs of the village fall under *long-ej* category. The stones for the construction of these megaliths are collected from the nearby hills. Like in other villages of the study area, in Bhogpur also stone slabs are present in front of each menhir, resting on three/ four small vertical pillars or over the piled up stones.

### **Chenimur Village**

Chenimur is situated 10 km. from Sonapur township. The village is 1.40 km. in length and 1.30 km. across. Seventy five per cent of the people of this village belong to the Karbi tribe and the remaining twenty five per cent population is composed of the Bodos, the Rabhas, and the Assamese caste people. The village is situated in plains area. There are 260 (9.00%) megaliths in Chenimur village among which 85 (5.70%) are menhir, 170 (85.36%) are table stone, and 105 (8.00%) are religious table stone. It is pertinent to note here that all the menhirs of the village are *long-ex* type; *cheng-e* type of megaliths of the village can be divided into *cheng-ej* and *cheng-e,,* type.





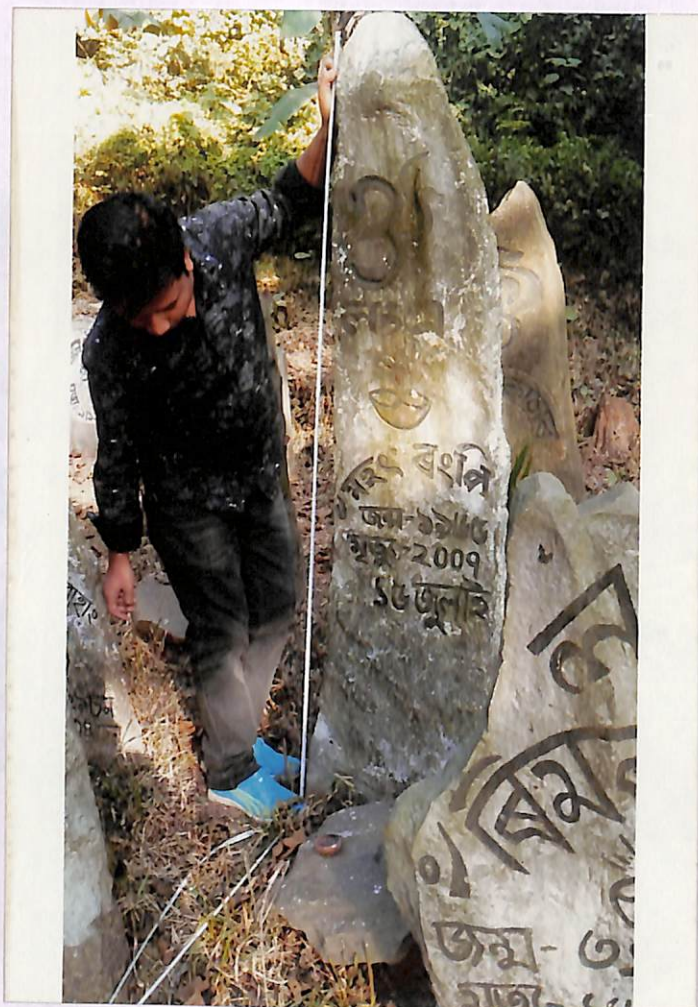




























**PART-II**  
**MEGALITHS IN GUWAHATI :**  
**PLATES-IX- XI**

**Xilputa (Japorigog)**

This Karbi village is situated at about 1.5 km away from the capital of Assam i.e. Dispur which is located within the Guwahati city. The megalithic practice is still a living tradition among the Karbi villagers living there. 80 megaliths of different shape and size from the site were spotted and some of them are found to be three hundred to four hundred years old. The largest one is measured 3.4 m in height and 2.82 m in breadth

**Karbi path (Hatigarh Chariali)**

This village is situated about 9 km away from Dispur and has 30 Karbi households. Presently there is no existence of common megalithic ground for these villagers due to increasing population. The villagers now place the megaliths inside their residential boundaries. One megalith is measured 0.5 m in height and 0.15 m in breadth.

**Dholbama**

This site is situated at about 13 km away **Dholbama** This site is situated at about 13 km away from Dispur. The site is a cluster of 40 megaliths. But there is no demarcated boundary of this area. A newly established stone grinding factory has affected the megaliths. The largest one is measured 0.69 m in height and 0.63 m in breadth.

**Jyotikuchi**

This site is situated at about 16 km away from Dispur. The site has evidence of burial and old structures of megaliths are not existing at present due to massive earth filling. New megaliths have been placed at the same site. 16 megaliths

have been found there. The largest one is measured 0.7 m in height and 0.37 m in breadth.

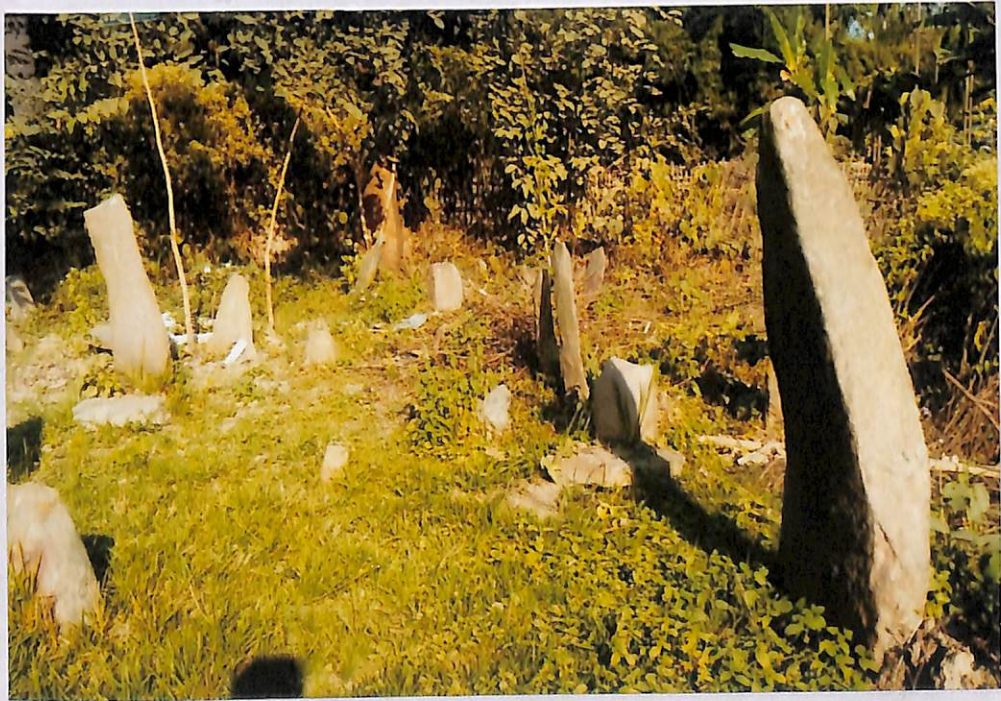
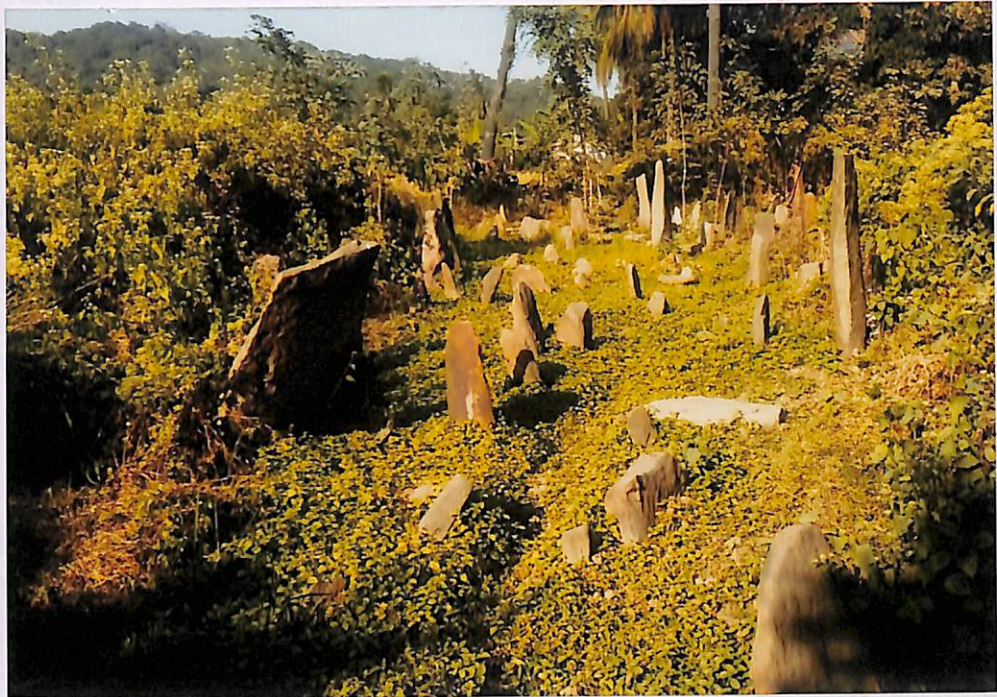
#### **4.7 Nalapara**

This area is situated at about 12 km away from Dispur. 69 megaliths of different shape and size have been found at this site. According to the villagers, some of them are more than two hundred years old. The largest megalith is measured to be 1.16 m in height and 0.57 m in breadth.

#### **Lokhra**

This site is almost 13 km away from Dispur and is full of old and new megaliths. The total number of megaliths found is 120. Both ancient and modern megaliths are present. The largest one is measured 0.67 m in height and 0.37 m in breadth.











PART III



### **PART-III**

#### **MEGALITHS IN RANI & BOKO AREA :**

#### **PLATES-XII & XIII**

Rani area falls under the Azara Circle in the Western part of Kamrup Metro District. This site is located at a distance of about 40 km away from Dispur. There was only one site where 73 menhirs were located beside Rani- Palasbari road. Some of the menhirs had stone slabs in front of them while many of these have been dislocated. All the megaliths are ancient. Some of the megaliths are very big in shape and size. The size of the largest megalith is measured 3.07 m in height and 1.2 m in breadth. There is no demarcated boundary in this site. At the time of construction of road, many megaliths were misplaced and some of those were found to be broken. The local residents of the area happens to be Pati Rabha who are not aware about the people who had erected .







PART IV



## **PART-IV**

### **Megaliths From West Karbi Anglong District.**

#### **PLATES- IV - XXVII**

Megalithic remains were recovered from different parts of western Karbi Anglong within the jurisdiction of Hamren subdivision. Megalithic remains of Karbi Anglong was first recorded by D.K. Medhi and his students during the course of fieldwork conducted in the year 1995 in western part of Karbi Anglong in Hamren subdivision (Medhi 1999). The dilapidated, unnoticed and uncared conditions of these pieces of cultural treasures led Mr. Medhi to undertake conservation as well as awareness efforts and with this in view the first Megalithic Monument Conservation Day was organised at Kamarpha, a village situated at a distance of about 40km Southeast of Hamren. Consequently, the Second and Third Megalithic Monument Conservation Day was observed at Tika and Nongjrong - two megalithic sites in Hamren subdivisions respectively in the years 1998 and 1999. Majority of the megalithic remains are weathered and in dilapidated conditions indicating their primitiveness while only a few of them look fresh including the ones erected as a part of mortuary practice observed by a section of the Karbis. Some of the sites cannot be termed site in true archaeological sense but mere spots. The important megalithic sites of Karbi Anglong are:

**Kamarpha:**

It is a small hamlet lying at a distance of 40 km southeast of sub divisional headquarters of Hamren in West Karbi Anglong. Zerthung- a stream connecting Barapani (locally known as Langpi) flows near the site. The Hatipahar located on the right bank of the Zerthung near Kamarpha is an important archaeological site marked by beautiful rock cut engravings. In the midstream of Zerthung at Hatipahar lies a beautiful but partially broken statue of an elephant, a little upstream, an imaginary footprint of the Karbi hero – *Thon Nok Be* and three rock-cut chairs again further up the same river at its midstream are highly revered by the local people. These engravings together with the megalithic ruins of Kamarpha have raised the archaeological importance of this area. Altogether seventy-three pieces of megaliths were recorded from the backyard of five villagers extending over an area of one km. The structures are mainly menhirs and are in weathered and dilapidated conditions and most of them are buried underground. The Tiwas, another major tribes of central Assam, inhabit the place and they are believed to have migrated to this place in the recent historical period. The Karbis reside in the surrounding foothills away from the villages. Altogether seventy three pieces of menhirs are located in different localities of this site. Most of these are from the household premises of the different villagers. The measurement of the largest and the smallest menhir from this site I

**Rongali:**

This is a prolific megalithic site about 20km away from the township of Hamren. The site is located in an unmanned location on the hilltop of Tika hills and surrounded by dense forest. The river Barapani (*Langpi*) flows deep down the site forming a meander after striking against the



hard rocks of the Tika hills. Villages inhabited by the Karbis are situated at a distance of about two kilometers away from the site and the local people inform that the Karbis in the past inhabited adjacent to the megalithic site.

Few pieces of stone platform were also recorded in the site. Most of the structures are broken and displaced from its in situ position after being uprooted from the ground. The structures had to be cleared with brush and the jungles cleared before recording. The local Karbis call the site as *Harlong Langehar* and the menhirs as *Okechan Along am*. The dominant rock type of the area is gneiss, shale and quartzite. A few metres up the site a large menhir lie in isolation with a stone platform in front and two such smaller structures in front. The menhir measures 2.8 m in height (maximum) and 0.8m in breadth (maximum) and the stone platform with a length of one meter is a place of high regard for the local Karbis and they believe that it was the sitting place of the Karbi legendary hero - *Than*

### **Umcherra:**

This site is situated about 10km away from the township of Hamren. The Umcherra tea garden lies adjacent to the site. The stream Umrasi flows adjacent to the site. The site has one big menhir and two big dolmens on both sides of the menhir (Fig10). The maximum height of the dolmen is 0.68 m above the ground.



### **Nongjrong:**

Nongjrong along the Karbi-Khasi (Assam-Meghalaya) border is another noteworthy megalithic site of west Karbi Anglong. The site is located at a distance of about 45km northwest of Hamren, Located over a grassy undulated hilly terrain interspersed by tall grasses, the site is full of scattered blocks of rock. Villages inhabited mainly by the Karbis and the Khasis are situated about one km down the site. Besides these two communities, villages inhabited by Nepal is are also situated nearby. Near a stream locally known as Nongjrong, a huge dolmen with a height (maximum) of 1.92 m was recovered. The horizontal slab is placed on three vertical stones structures that lie in west, east and north directions respectively. This is the largest dolmen recorded so far in Karbi Anglong and entire Northeast India.





